

Faith — What Is It and Where Does It Come From? — by John Anning

"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast" Ephesians 2:8, 9

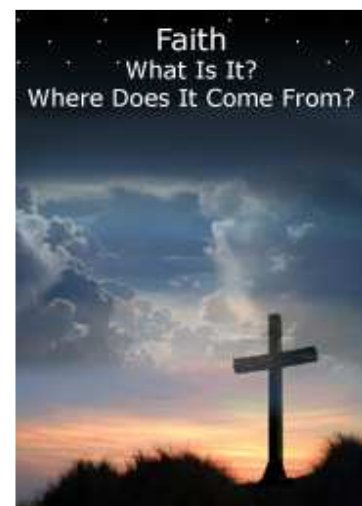
God's Universal Call to Believe

Introduction

God is clear in His Word about "*believing*" by "*faith*", the Gospel of salvation. It is also clear about Christ's suffering, death, burial, and resurrection in redeeming those, who by faith, receive Christ as their personal Lord and Savior.

Scripture tells us over and over that faith in Jesus Christ is the requirement for receiving salvation. It would seem that anyone who has ears to hear and a mind to comprehend, should understand this simple request from God—believe in Jesus Christ and you will be saved! Simple right? Then why do so many struggle with this simple request? Why do so many carry on in their unbelief as if there is no God at all? And why do those who do claim belief in God, not necessarily put their faith in the person of Jesus Christ? There are many explanations out there for this—primarily man's inherent stubbornness.

So how is man's stubbornness overcome? What must happen for a man to change his mind? What do the Scriptures teach us about this problem?



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What is Faith?

My Early and Faulty Reasoning about Faith - What It's Not

When I was a freshman in high school, I remember my sociology teacher asking the class "why do we believe?". No one uttered a word for a few minutes because of the risk of saying something totally stupid that would bring laughter and ridicule against them. I guess I was the brave one, because I raised my hand up to offer an answer. "Yes Mr. Anning, do you know?" the teacher asked. And I said something that I now regret. I answered by saying: "Because it makes us feel secure?". The teacher's eyes sprang open. He smiled, looked at me, and said: "That's beautiful!". The class responded in Wow's. I guess I told him what he wanted to hear. But I did not understand faith well enough at that time to realize that true faith transcends even my personal need to feel secure and my inability to develop it on my own.

What It Is

Faith is defined by God's Word in **Hebrews 11:1** as follows:

(Hebrews 11:1)

"Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see."

Well, it's clear already that my high school version of faith failed the Hebrews 11:1 test of faith. I was NOT sure of the things I hoped for, and employed hope to substantiate my faith instead of employing faith to substantiate my hope. Faith is "*being sure of our hope*", not "*hoping that our faith is sure*".

I also failed the second criteria of Hebrews 11:1 in my shallow reasoning, by only allowing that which was seen and experienced by me, to validate my faith. According to Hebrews 11:1, faith is "being certain of what I do not see", not "in what I have seen". Faith is powerful, if it is true faith from God, and not just a crutch that we use to dismiss things that we cannot understand. Faith involves being *sure*, not *unsure*. Faith is being *certain*, not *uncertain*.

The word faith is often misrepresented as meaning belief in something for no reason, or belief in something with no evidence to substantiate it. Even Mark Twain has been quoted as saying that "*Faith is believing what you know ain't so*". I profoundly disagree with this. Although it may seem that some practice faith in things for no apparent reasons, all of us have reasons to put our faith in things, despite whether they are legitimate reasons or not. There is a reason and a rationale for everything that we think and do.

I believe, by faith, that man has visited the moon. Even though I did not witness the event first hand (other than on live television, which could have been staged), I have good reason, because of the available technology that I know existed, to believe we were not deceived about the lunar landings. I did not experience or witness first hand World War I or World War II either, but there is enough evidence and documentation to convince me that they did indeed occur. And even though I cannot see, feel, or hold gravity or magnetic forces in my hand, by the evidence through effects and observation, I have no problem believing by faith that they exist.

The point here is that faith, in anything, will always be exercised, if there is sufficient rationale for doing so, and never for no reason at all.

So how can an unregenerate "*natural man*", having no connection with God and with no spiritual awareness, exercise faith in someone whom they cannot see, feel, experience or relate with? How can faith be exercised in any aspect of a spiritual realm that someone is not even aware of? They simply have no rationale to support such a faith.

Those who do exercise spiritual faith in Christ, cannot see God, nor have they ever personally met Jesus Christ in the flesh either, but they know rationally that God exists (see the [Origins](#) page) and that His Son Jesus Christ is real, both historically and experientially. They have an overwhelming rationale that supports their faith—But why?

So, now that God's word has defined faith for us, and we have examined basic rationale for having faith, let's consider why we have spiritual faith in Christ at all and what its ultimate source is. Why do we believe? ... Why do we not believe?

How Severe Was The Fall Of Man?

Opinions of just how severe the fall of man was, as a result of man's rebellion in the garden, vary drastically. Most agree that the moral abilities of mankind after the fall are definitely a factor in his decision making process, but to what degree is debatable.

First of all, the scriptures seem quite clear about the default condition of man...

(Psalm. 51:5)

Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.

(John 8:44-46)

"You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies. Yet because I tell the truth, you do not believe me! Can any of you prove me guilty of sin? If I am telling the truth, why don't you believe me? He who belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God."

(Romans 3:11)

there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God

(Isaiah 64:6)

All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away

(Romans 3:12)

All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one

This should be enough to convince us how inherently depraved we are, even at birth, before we have done anything good or bad.

Apart from what the scriptures says, is there any other way that we can determine the severity of the fall, apart from any influence from God? Is there a way we can somehow gauge our default corruptness? I think that there is. Have you ever studied a young, undisciplined child? At the very core of a child, is the desire to steal, cheat, covet, lie... need I continue? These are NOT learned behaviors, they are inherited behaviors! We must constantly teach a child to not steal, not cheat, not covet, not lie, etc... It is the very nature of a child to be selfish and self-seeking in their desires, no matter what the cost to others or themselves.

Another example, regarding man's moral bankruptcy, that comes to mind, is the effect of alcohol usage. Alcohol has an interesting effect on people. Most believe that alcohol influences and changes people in ways that makes them do and say things that they would not normally do or say otherwise. While I agree with these noticeable effects of alcohol, I would disagree that it is alcohol that is at fault for this apparent behavioral change. Alcohol does not make us bad, rather it strips away the layers of pretense and inhibitions, revealing the dark ugliness that is already present in an unregenerate person. When people are of sober mind, they are constantly hiding their true feelings and reactions to circumstances. Alcohol just removes the fear of being exposed to the dark, carnal side and makes them bold enough to be who they really are. Apart from God, we all have a horrible and corrupted dark side, which has deep generational roots in the sinful nature. It's so embarrassing, that most hide it, mask it, lie about it, even do drugs to not feel so bad about it. It causes depression so great that most people (even those considered healthy) take some form of mind-altering chemical to deal with it.

Let's just be honest—apart from the Lord, we are despicable in the site of the Lord... Not just off course a little, but dead, corrupt to the core, and in serious need of forgiveness, life, and a power that is not inherently available in man himself! We desperately need the grace and power of Almighty God Himself invading our desperate and lost souls. The sinful nature of man

must be replaced with a new nature, if anything good is to come from a man.

The Spirit of God strips us of our false sense of self-righteousness, by uncovering our depraved nature to the point of repentance. He enables us to see how corrupt we really are and enables us to make an honest appraisal of ourselves to the point of begging God for mercy and forgiveness, effectively leading us to total surrender to Jesus Christ, willingly. If someone has never experienced this, then the Spirit of God has never visited them. Resisting the power and conversion of the Holy Spirit of God is like resisting the effects of alcohol. It's impossible! Either the Spirit has influenced us to repentance, or He has not. The ministry of the Spirit of God is so powerful, that when experienced, man cannot continue in his former way of life (which was actually a living death). Any man who thinks they can resist the power of God's Spirit, must either believe they are more powerful than the Spirit, or mistaken about the Spirit ever really convicting him.

(Romans 8:6)

The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace;

(Romans 8:9)

You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ.

(1 Corinthians 12:3)

Therefore I tell you that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, "Jesus be cursed," and no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit.

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Where Does Our Spiritual Faith In Christ Come From—Why Do We Believe?

Can the Unwilling Ever be Willing to Come to Christ?

Someone who is unwilling to do something, will not do it. Someone who is willing to do something, will do it. But someone who is unwilling to do something, can never be willing to do it, as long as they are unwilling. They cannot be willing and unwilling at the same time and in the same relationship! This would make no sense at all and be classified as a statement that violates the "*law of self contradiction*".

However, there are things that we are willing to do that we do not desire to do, and conversely, things that we are unwilling to do but desire to do. In other words, we can be willing but not wanting, or wanting but not willing. This can happen when our will and our wants are at odds with each other. Our wills and our desires are two separate workings of our soul, (Mind, Will, & Emotions) Again, we are either willing or not willing to do or not do something... But not both or neither at the same time.

An unwilling mind-set must be transformed, somehow, to a willing mind-set before being willing to do anything. So, the unwilling must be made willing to come to Christ. This may

seem like a play on words, but it is important to understand what the will of man can and cannot do. Something must happen in the will itself to turn from unwillingness to willingness—but what is it?

Do I Have to be Real Smart, or Be Better Than Others, or Something Else to Develop and Posses True Saving Faith?

This is the heart and soul (no pun intended) of my examinations. I have contemplated this question ever since my faith was developed. Just how much credit can I declare (if any) regarding my faith? Why do some choose Christ by faith, and others choose against faith in Christ? Are we totally free in our choices? What makes those who receive by faith different from those who reject? If faith is being sure of what we hope for, where does this assurance come from? If faith is being certain of what we do not see, where does this certainty come from? There are many questions to consider.

The primary questions to consider are these:

Is the grace of God the result of man's faith? Or, is man's faith the result of God's grace?

If the grace of God is the result of man's faith, then doesn't man effectually save himself by his faith?

If man's faith is the result of God's grace, then doesn't God effectually save man by His grace?

I think the answers can be found in the scriptures, with the very nature of faith itself. It is apparent to me that faith is not the result of an individuals intellect, knowledge, good deeds, or anything else that is inherently part of man's abilities or even desires. It must come to a man apart from himself, supernaturally. The Bible speaks of having faith, but does it tell us that it is up to us to develop it, or to simply practice it when we have it? I think the latter.

If we examine a few Bible verses, we will start to see a pattern of where our faith comes from. Consider the following Scriptures:

(All scriptural references are NIV)

(John 1:11-13)

He came to that which was His own, but His own did not receive Him. Yet to all who received Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

(1 Corinthians 2:14)

The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.

(John 6:65)

He went on to say, "This is why I told you that no one can come to Me unless the Father has enabled him"

(John 6:37)

All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and whoever comes to Me I will never drive away.

(Luke 10:22)

"All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows who the Son is except the Father, and no one knows who the Father is except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him."

(Hebrews 12:2)

Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

(Ephesians 2:8,9)

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast

(Romans 9:16)

It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy

(Philippians 2:13)

for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to His good purpose

(Philippians 1:6)

being confident of this, that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus

(2 Corinthians 1:21)

Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us...

(Romans 10:20)

And Isaiah boldly says, "I was found by those who did not seek Me; I revealed Myself to those who did not ask for Me"

(Romans 12:3)

For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.

(Acts 3:16)

... It is Jesus' name and the faith that comes through Him that has given this complete healing to him, as you can all see.

(1 John 5:1)

Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves His Child as well.

(Acts 13:48)

When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the Word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed

(Acts 18:27)

When Apollos wanted to go to Achaia, the brothers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples

there to welcome him. On arriving, he was a great help to those who by grace had believed.

(Romans 8:33,34)

Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is He that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us

(Zephaniah 1:7)

Be silent before the Sovereign LORD, for the day of the LORD is near. The LORD has prepared a sacrifice; He has consecrated those He has invited.

(Ephesians 1:4-6)

For He chose us in Him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight. In love. He predestined us to be adopted as His sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with His pleasure and will—to the praise of His glorious grace, which He has freely given us in the One He loves

It seems apparent in all of these Scriptures who is doing the enabling regarding our faith. Faith is a gift. Faith is given to us by God Himself by divine invitation only. Yes, God expects all of his creatures to honor him in faith. In fact, He demands it. But because of the total and spiritual fall of man, we became unable to exercise true faith in God on our own, now requiring God's divine intervention for His fallen creation, for true faith to be possible at all. It is important that we realize just how severe and crippling the fall of man was. The next three verses should be a reality check for those who believe that man still has some moral goodness, capable of saving faith apart from God's intervention:

(Romans 3:11)

there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God

(Isaiah 64:6)

All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away

(Romans 3:12)

All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one

God's external call to salvation is universal, so that all of mankind hears what is being offered. But because of the deep fall of man through original sin, the default heart of man is like stone. Even though the offer is heard, the offer is not really understood, because the perception of needing a savior is not understood. The external call cannot, in and of itself, soften a man's heart or provide the ability to understand the call in any effectual way. The only call that man will ever understand is a supernatural, internal call that can be clearly understood and executed in an effectual way. Our heart of stone must be made mutable and workable into a soft absorbing soil first—It must be re-worked, ready and willing, before any spiritual seed can take root. I think that Jesus was explaining this idea to His disciples using His famous parable in Mark 4:3-12:

(Mark 4:3-12)

"Listen! A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants, so that they did not bear grain. Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up, grew and produced a crop, multiplying thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times." Then Jesus said, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." When he was alone, the Twelve and the others around him asked him about the parables. He told them, "The secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you. But to those on the outside everything is said in parables so that, 'they may be ever seeing but never perceiving, and ever hearing but never understanding; otherwise they might turn and be forgiven!'"

I find it interesting that in this parable, that the ONLY seed that takes root and produces, is the seed that falls on "good soil". So what is it that makes soil good enough to receive seed, and produce? In the natural world, soil must be prepared and worked in order to receive seed and produce a crop. Likewise, a man's heart must be prepared and worked in order to receive Spiritual seed from Heaven, if a crop is to be successful at all. So, just because seed is sown everywhere on earth, does not mean that it will take root everywhere on earth.

Just because God demands that we all trust Him by faith, does not mean that we are able to. It is not wrong or inconsistent for God to demand of us, things we are incapable of. His standard is high and righteous. We fall well short of it. But this is still no reason for God to demand less or to compromise His holy standards just because of *our* shortcomings. The law of God demanded perfection even though it could only frustrate us by revealing our imperfection. God knew when he gave Moses the law that His people could not keep it. In the same way, He demands that all believe in the One whom He sent for the redemption of man, even though He knows that men cannot grasp it unless He reveals it in a special way.

(Ezekiel 36:26)

I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.

So God, in His mercy and grace, has restored and enabled some to exercise a measure of faith that He has freely lavished upon them, undeservingly and supernaturally. Just as a farmer prepares the soil to accept seed and produce a crop, God has prepared some men's hearts to receive the Spiritual seed that He has planted in order to produce His Spiritual crop. It is quite clear to me that faith itself is a heavenly gift from Almighty God. We can not experience it unless we are given it. And when our faith is from God and genuine, we indeed will "*be sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see*".

Is Everyone or Anyone Capable of Responding, by Faith, to God's External Call of Salvation?

To Doubt is Earthly and Natural —To Believe is Heavenly and Supernatural

It has been argued by many well-meaning Christians that everyone has what it takes to

understand their spiritual dilemma, and without any assistance from God, is capable of responding in faith in order to receive salvation. I would challenge this theology and respond by declaring that no one is capable of responding, by faith, to God's external call of salvation! Romans 3:11 seems to be very clear about this where it states: "there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God". If no one seeks God, then no one will respond to any external call by God. Simply hearing the Gospel of Salvation is not sufficient to convert or convince anyone of their need unless God reveals it in a supernatural way. And, even when our moral dilemma is truly understood, by nature, we have no power to change our mind or actions regarding it, but rather indulge our sinful nature in every way imaginable.

I am not suggesting here that the Gospel is ineffective. I am suggesting that the Gospel is effective ONLY when revealed by the Spirit of God internally and personally. Yes, the Gospel must be shared in order to be heard. But it will never be understood unless God cements it into our heart. When the Spirit reveals a man's need, He reveals the Gospel. And when He reveals the Gospel, He gives the necessary power and life to respond to it willingly. There is no other way that a man will be saved other than God exercising His sovereign grace and power in a man.

Even though I would love to believe that God supernaturally reveals Himself to all mankind in a way that all can effectually comprehend His Holy call and repent, it seems evident in the Scriptures that He does not. Jesus, speaking below, to His twelve disciples and others around Him is recorded as saying the following regarding why He spoke in parables:

(Mark 4:11,12) *He told them, "The secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you. But to those on the outside everything is said in parables so that, 'they may be ever seeing but never perceiving, and ever hearing but never understanding; otherwise they might turn and be forgiven!'"*

Some bibles may have a footnote attached at the bottom that attempts to explain away this amazing statement as only meaning that Jesus knew that some would reject Him anyway because of the hardness of their hearts, which is really what keeps them blind and deaf. But this explanation does not do justice to what Jesus said. He was explaining "why" He was speaking in parables. If Jesus was simply trying to communicate the hardness of men's hearts as to why they reject His message, then why would He need to speak in parables at all? What difference would it make? Although it is certainly true that it is the hardness of men's hearts that keeps them blind and deaf to the Gospel message, it is equally true that special revelation is required to penetrate this darkness. A parable could only accomplish this with those who are given the "*secret of the Kingdom of God*" supernaturally, while at the same time keeping those on the "outside" in the dark. Also note that Jesus refers to the Kingdom of God as a "*secret*" that has been "*revealed*" to the twelve and others. It is clear to me that parables were a way to actually prevent some from turning and being forgiven. I admit that this is very hard to accept, but so is the Gospel of salvation, that billions throughout history have rejected. The Gospel message is not a natural message. It is not logical or acceptable by human reasoning, and in fact, quite offensive by human standards. But "God's ways are not man's ways", and human reasoning should never dictate spiritual solutions which are God's alone to establish. God is certainly capable of forgiving and saving everyone. God does say in His word that He desires that none should perish. **(2 Pet 3:9)** But who was Peter writing to in this second letter? Believers! It's obvious that God will not allow any of his elect to perish. But the hard question here is this: Why does anyone parish? If God's choices in election are ultimately sovereign over man's choices, then why doesn't God restore all men to Himself by offering His

effectual grace to all? Why doesn't He install the measure of faith necessary for salvation in everyone? To be honest, I do not know. God has his reasons, but I do not believe that we should ever question why God does anything that He does or doesn't do.

This exclusion can be observed again in *John 12:37-40* quoting *Isaiah*:

(John 12:37-40)

Even after Jesus had done all these miraculous signs in their presence, they still would not believe in Him. This was to fulfill the word of Isaiah the prophet: "Lord, who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?" For this reason they could not believe, because, as Isaiah says elsewhere: "He has blinded their eyes and deadened their hearts, so they can neither see with their eyes, nor understand with their hearts, nor turn—and I would heal them."

When we examine the Scriptures, we find that Christ specifically gave Himself up for the Church. He gave Himself up for the sheep, (not the goats). And He prayed, not for the world, but rather for those who belong to the Father!

(Ephesians 5:25)

...just as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her

(John 10:15)

just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep.

(John 17:9)

I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours.

The 3rd point of Calvinism (Limited Atonement or Particular Redemption) was formulated from this Biblical truth.

I do not mean to sound callous or unsympathetic to those who will be lost forever and perish, as my heart grieves thinking about their eternal and inescapable grief. But we must realize that God, in His holiness and justice, could condemn all of mankind, past, present, and future to eternal hell and be totally justified in doing so. So if God, for His own good pleasure and sovereign purposes, sees to it that a remnant will be saved and gathered unto Himself, He has every right to do that, without us questioning His motives or claiming that He is not fair. God administers His justice to those who perish, and His non-justice to those whom He saves, by way of the cross where Jesus Himself received the penalty for His elect. But no one ever receives injustice from God. The only hint found in Scriptures as to why God saves some and not all, is found in Romans 9:22-24. (*See Below*)

(Romans 9:22-24)

What if God, choosing to show His wrath and make His power known, bore with great patience the objects of His wrath—prepared for destruction? What if He did this to make the riches of His glory known to the objects of His mercy, whom He prepared in advance for glory— even us, whom He also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles?

One thing is for sure; God's sovereign choice for His elect is certainly not based on the merits

of men, because if it were, then no one would be elected! None are worthy, none seek God, and none have the capacity, in their corrupt and fallen nature, to do any good. As stated earlier, anyone who thinks that their own faith is what God looks at, to qualify them for salvation, must believe that their faith was produced righteously apart from any gift that was received from God.

Even If man were capable of developing faith apart from God's grace, then we would have to account for this by asking why this is so. Why would some men possess sufficient power to believe while others do not? Do some men have the upper hand in making moral decisions? And if so, why? If some men do possess sufficient power to believe the Gospel of salvation, then this could only be because God made some men more righteous than others, in their capacity to "believe". Therefore, God would still get the credit for His election strategy in offering some a capacity for faith that He evidently does not offer to others. No matter how we slice it, God is still at work in His sovereign election—it is a heavenly work that is not ours to boast in, and a work that we cannot achieve by ourselves apart from God.

(1 Corinthians 1:30,31)

It is because of Him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. Therefore, as it is written: "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord."

Who Gets the Credit for Your Faith or Mine?

Is Our Faith From Us or From God?

It should be obvious at this point to realize that faith must be from God. Apart from God, saving faith is not possible in fallen man, due to the inherent corrupt nature of man after the "Great Fall". And because "*the measure of faith God has given you*" is enough to secure salvation, then of course it is God who should get the credit for our faith, our good works as a result of our faith, the fruits of the Spirit, and everything else God does in and through us. "*To God Be The Glory*" were certainly wise words, and we should remember to always give God the glory—for everything!

Ephesians 2:8 and 9 states the following:

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast

When reading this text, we need to consider what the phrase "*and this not from yourselves*" is referring to—grace, faith, or both? One interpretation is that "*grace is not of yourselves*". Another interpretation could be "*faith is not of yourselves*". And a third interpretation could mean "*both grace and faith is not of yourselves*". The way that one interprets the word "*this*" in Ephesians 2:8 and 9 will mean the difference between believing that faith is of ourselves, or *is not* of ourselves—but rather a gift along with grace.

If we were to interpret this verse using a grammatical litmus test, then the portion of text that states "*and this not from yourselves*" would be all inclusive of what preceded it—*grace* and

faith, since neither grace or faith were mentioned specifically as to what was "*not from of yourselves*". Of course our modern-day translations could have changed the grammatical rules that were found in the original Greek text and grammar. But I think not. It would be perfectly consistent with other Scriptures to interpret this as meaning that grace AND faith are not of ourselves, but the gift of God.

We should note that prior to Pentecost, Jesus was always remarking to His apostles about their lack of faith. They just didn't get it. But after Pentecost, and after the Holy Spirit occupied and empowered them, their faith was so powerful that it led them to their deaths for the sake of preaching Jesus Christ! I know of no human attribute or mere human faith that can empower a man so boldly. Only God could create and work a faith so grea

What is the Sovereignty of God and How Sovereign is He?

What is the Sovereignty of God?

The word "*Sovereign*", as defined by Princeton University - A lexical database for the English language.

Source: <http://wordnet.princeton.edu/perl/webwn?s=sovereign>

(adj) *autonomous, independent, self-governing, sovereign ((of political bodies) not controlled by outside forces) "an autonomous judiciary"; "a sovereign state"*

(adj) *sovereign, supreme (greatest in status or authority or power) "a supreme tribunal"*

The word "*Sovereign*" is used almost 300 times in the *New International Version* translation, 3 times in the *New American Standard* translation, 3 times in the *New King James* translation, and in all cases but a few, it is used in addressing God as "*Sovereign Lord*". In the *NAS*, *KJ*, and *NKJ* translations, the phrase "*Lord God*" was often used instead of the phrase "*Sovereign Lord*". In some other verses, the word "*rules*" was used instead of "*is sovereign*". (See examples below)

New King James example:

(Daniel 5:21)

Then he was driven from the sons of men, his heart was made like the beasts, and his dwelling was with the wild donkeys. They fed him with grass like oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, till he knew that the Most High God rules in the kingdom of men, and appoints over it whomever He chooses.

NIV example:

(Daniel 5:21)

He was driven away from people and given the mind of an animal; he lived with the wild donkeys and ate grass like cattle; and his body was drenched with the dew of heaven, until he acknowledged that the Most High God is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and sets over them anyone he wishes.

No matter what translation you prefer, the central idea is the same, with either the word "sovereign", "rules", or "Lord", all having to do with an ultimate authority above all men and things.

How Sovereign is God? Can Anything Happen or Not Happen Without God's Permission?

We must absolutely get a handle on the character of God regarding His sovereignty. He is above all things. He is Master above and over the universe and over everything in it created by Him and for Him. He rules, reigns, and is accountable to no one. His will is immutable and unshakable. Everything that comes to be or happen, is by His permission, and nothing can be or happen without His permission. There is nothing or no one that is more sovereign than God because if there were, He would not be the ruling and authoritative God indicated by the scriptures. All that exists and all that happens or does not happen, is under God's sovereign supervision and is included in His Holy and sovereign will, either actively or passively.

There can be only one sovereign being above all other beings, because co-sovereignty is impossible. To paraphrase Dr. R. C. Sproul (*Chosen by God*), he explains it like this: *Imagine an immovable object trying to co-exist with an irresistible force. The two would be locked forever in a never ending, winless battle and neither one could be absolutely sovereign over the other if equally sovereign. Either the object is immovable, or the force is irresistible, but both cannot co-exist at the same time and in the same relationship.*

If a person goes on a rampage and kills someone, God's sovereign will is still being accomplished, either actively or passively, in that God did not prevent it from happening, and choose to let the murderer operate under his sinful choices and actions. In this case, His will is being accomplished passively by allowing something to happen. God uses even our sinful choices and actions in His sovereign will. Does God justify our sinful choices in His sovereignty? Of course not! Sin is still sin and is punishable by death under God's holy law, unless they have died to the law and been placed under God's grace. But God's sovereign will is always accomplished and cannot be frustrated by the actions or non-actions of man. Obviously, God allows his creatures to sin and make a mess out of things, even though He does not approve of sin. He gives man the freedom to sin without justifying or approving man's actions. It does seem that God keeps certain individuals on a shorter leash than what He does with others. He gives some more freedom than others, in making a horrible mess of things. But this is all in His sovereign purpose and plan. When God gives an unregenerate man more freedom, the corruptness of that man will flourish, because in his freedom, his corrupt nature will be exercised more freely. (A perfect example of this was Adolf Hitler) When God keeps an unregenerate man on a short leash and restricts his freedom, a man will have less freedom to exercise his corruptness. Either way, God's sovereignty is at work. Even though evil exists, it can ONLY exist because God has given permission or allowed it to exist. If God did not give evil permission to exist, it could not exist. If God did not give evil permission to exist, and it came into existence anyway, then evil would be more sovereign than God. But evil cannot be more sovereign than God, or even equally sovereign with God, because the God of scriptures is sovereign over all. Therefore, God has permitted the existence of evil. He has allowed it's very existence.

We need to be very careful here; I did not say that God created evil, nor am I claiming that He is the author of evil. God is perfect in character and incapable of creating evil because it would

be inconsistent with His holy and perfect nature. However, because evil does exist, God has therefore, for His holy and sovereign purposes, allowed it to exist for some reason not yet known. But because God is sovereign over all things and all circumstances, past, present and future, His sovereign plans are purposeful and perfect in all that He allows or permits.

Because God is sovereign, no one will ever go to heaven or hell unless He sovereignly permits it. His perfect will and His permissive will are one in the same, working harmoniously, because everything that God permits is perfect in His sovereignty. Yes, even the existence of evil and hell, are permitted parts of His perfect, holy, and sovereign purposes.

God is Sovereign and Man's Will is Subject to God's Sovereignty

I think that it is about time God's Church embraces humility when it comes to God's sovereignty, even if it jeopardizes theologies regarding man's so-called *free-will* as being supreme as to what shapes God's will for man. If God sovereignly wills that a man should be undeservingly saved, then that man will desire God and receive His Son, through the Spirit, by the works of His grace alone. If God wills that a man should righteously perish, then a man will perish deservingly with no valid grounds for a rebuttal or grievance. Such a man will never desire God, unless God does a supernatural work in him.

It is God's sovereign supremacy over a man's *will* that ultimately saves a man! Equally true, it is God's sovereign *will* that allows a man to reject Him. God sovereignty permits condemned men to naturally reject Him, but also permits condemned men to supernaturally receive Him. Nothing can happen without God's permission... Nothing!

The sovereignty of God is not a negative attribute to be disputed but rather a positive attribute, when we consider that only by God's sovereignty is it possible for men to be saved at all. If man's *will* rules over God's *will*, regarding salvation, all would perish in unbelief with no hope of rescue. Eventually, all of us will be on our knees praising our righteous and gracious God, that He sovereignly chose to rescue anyone at all.

Man's Free Will vs. God's Sovereignty—Who Wins?

This Question is Already Biased

We, as thinking Christians, debate this question among us often. But why do we do so? The *sovereignty of God* and the *free will of man* are two separate issues and should not be confused with each other. To state a common cliché, "*It's like comparing apples with oranges*". What we should be comparing is *God's sovereignty versus man's sovereignty*, and *God's free will versus man's free will*. As examined earlier, we must concede to the reality that God is always sovereign over man, and that God's *will* always trumps man's *will*. The only way we can connect the dots between God's sovereignty and His *will*, is to acknowledge that God's *will* is sovereign. Therefore, the sovereignty of God always trumps the *will* of man, because the *will* of God always trumps the *will* of man.

Does God Choose Someone Because They Choose Him? Or Does Someone Choose God Because He Chose Them? Or is it Both or Neither?

This debate has been going on ever since modern models of secular humanist thinking have been going on. The idea behind the "*Free Will*" side of the debate is simply this: "*God would never violate the free will of a man to accomplish His purpose, because this would,*

in essence, turn man into a puppet where God is controlling the strings, and reduce man to a robot like state, not capable of a true and free expression of love and obedience toward God. Therefore, man's free will must be kept intact, and must not be influenced in any way, as to insure that men's choices made for God are sincere and honest in desiring to love and serve God."

Is the "Free Will" of Man Really Free?

This doctrine of "Free Will" is prevalent in modern thinking and in the modern church. It seems to make sense, at least from a human perspective and is the mantra of modern evangelism. The problem with this doctrine however, is the presupposition that the *will* of man is free. Nowhere in the scriptures do we find any doctrine of man's absolute moral freedom. On the contrary, we find man's blinding bondage to sin interfering with his judgment, as well as God's sovereign *will* being exercised contrary to what man would naturally desire. More often than not, we see God going about His business of exercising His sovereign *will*, contrary to that of man's *will*. We have already seen what the Scriptures have said about man's condition, namely the fallen and corrupt nature of man prior to any conversion. The Scriptures tell us that man does not desire or seek God (*Rom 3:11*). The *will* of man is in bondage to the sinful nature, and is not capable of choosing spiritual truth. In fact, we read in Scriptures that spiritual truth and biblical doctrines are foolishness in the eyes of unregenerate men without the working of Holy Spirit. So how can men freely choose anything that he rejects in the first place? How can he make a free choice if he himself is not free?

(1 Corinthians 1:18)

For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

(1 Corinthians 2:14)

The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.

Man's default and corrupted earthly will here on earth can never be absolutely free. It is controlled and influenced by the sinful nature through the world, the flesh, and the devil. Making a free moral choice for Christ is only possible if a man is free to do so, by the presence and enabling of the Spirit of God. But a man without the Spirit is simply not capable of making a free moral decision for Christ and will consider anything from God "foolishness", as indicated above in *1 Corinthians 2:14*.

Rejecting Jesus Christ is Natural—Accepting Jesus Christ is Supernatural

The default *will* of man is anything but free and is in desperate need of reform. The only way men can choose "freely", is if the man himself is made free by a supernatural event, removing him from the power and bondage of sin. A freeing transformation of the very nature of man must occur before a man can be willing to come to Christ freely, or free to come to Christ willingly.

In What Sense Does God "Harden" the Hearts of Men?

The Holy Scriptures makes several references to God hardening the hearts of men, preventing them from understanding truth and receiving salvation. This may seem, to some, like the doctrine of either a radical God, or a radical interpretation of God. It depends on how the word "Hardening" is understood. There are two views regarding "God's Hardening"; "Active Hardening" and "Passive Hardening". This leads us to the theological concept known as...

"The (Equal) and (Unequal) Ultimacy Views of Double Predestination"

How's that for a title! I didn't make this up... It's out there and is important to understand when dealing with God's active and passive will. God's will is always accomplished, and never frustrated. Nothing can frustrate the ultimate will of God. If something or someone could frustrate the sovereign will of God, then it would have to be more sovereign than God! And nothing is more sovereign than God!!

God's sovereign will is accomplished in two ways; "Actively" and "Passively". When God does something actively, He is directly influencing circumstances and/or people, to accomplish His holy purpose. When God does something passively, He is indirectly influencing circumstances (by doing nothing) to accomplish His holy purpose. Either way, He is accomplishing His holy purposes.

"The Equal Ultimacy View of Double Predestination" is the idea that (1) God actively regenerates the hearts of men, making them willing and able to receive the Gospel that leads to salvation and (2) actively hardens the rest of men's hearts by making them more corrupt than they already were before He hardened them, thus making it impossible for them to ever receive the Gospel of salvation. I totally reject this doctrine!

"The Unequal Ultimacy View of Double Predestination" is the idea that (1) God actively regenerates the hearts of men, making them willing and able to receive the Gospel that leads to salvation and (2) passively hardens the rest of men's hearts by leaving them inherently corrupt in their original nature (by not influencing or regenerating them), thus making it impossible for them to ever receive the Gospel of salvation by virtue of their own inherited stubbornness.

What Ultimately Rules—God's Sovereign Will or Man's Will?

You had better hope that it is God's *will* that ultimately rules the affairs of men, because left to man's *will*, without any supernatural influence or restoration, all men would perish in unbelief! It is amazing to me how many in the modern church believe that man has just enough moral goodness to understand their desperate need of a Savior and enough courage and power to believe and receive the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The Scripture tells us repeatedly that Spirit is born of Spirit—not flesh. Apart from God's supernatural revelation of Himself, man just doesn't get it, nor will he ever understand his dilemma by himself.

Okay, so some may agree that yes, God must reveal Himself supernaturally in order for men to understand his need, and understand what God offers. But isn't it possible for men to still reject God's offer of salvation even after it is clearly understood? Can't men resist God's grace?

My question is this: Who in their right mind, knowing how corrupt and desperate they are, and knowing what God is really offering, would want to resist? This reminds me of an interesting comparison that I once heard, where someone is offered a free meal and is required to make a choice for one of the two plates being offered; On one plate is dog vomit—on the other is a perfectly prepared filet mignon. Anyone who is in touch with reality at all, knowing the difference between the two, would ALWAYS choose the Filet mignon! If they choose the dog vomit, it would indicate that either they are making their choice in total darkness with no sense of vision, touch, taste or smell to aid them in their decision, or making their choice not knowing the difference between dog vomit and filet mignon. Either way, a decision for the dog vomit would be one based on total ignorance. This may seem like an extreme example to use, when comparing the desire for Jesus Christ with food, but for those who truly understand what is at "steak", (pun intended) the choice is just as easy and clear, when choosing between life

or death, heaven or hell and God or Satan. Grace refused is grace not understood! And grace not understood is grace not given!!

When God administers His grace to a man, He surely sees to it that the man will supernaturally understand two things; (1) How corrupt the man is, resulting in his knowing his desperate need of a Savior, and (2) How Holy God is, and the Savior He sent, His Son Jesus Christ, whom He has offered for the man's salvation. If a man does not understand these two critical truths, then obviously God has not, by His grace, revealed Himself to the man. God, in His graciousness, must reveal both man's problem and His solution to man's problem, or nothing can possibly happen in terms of a man's salvation. This is what God's grace is all about... revealing the problem and the solution in a way that is so clearly understood, that a man would never refuse the offer.

The Doctrine of Predestination

Is the Doctrine of Predestination Biblical?

There are those who warn against holding any view of predestination, claiming that it is not biblical to do so. But I must point out that the doctrine of predestination is not a man-made theology, but one that the Scriptures refer to specifically. The Bible makes reference to the word "predestined" four times, the phrase "the elect / His elect" eleven times and the word "election" three times. So the reason there is a theology of predestination and election is because the Bible discusses them.

The real issue here is not whether or not the Bible discusses the doctrines of predestination and election, because it does, but rather what these terms mean. There are basically two ways that men interpret the Biblical term predestination; (1) The act of God, in eternity past, choosing those for salvation based on His foreknowledge of their willingness to receive Him and (2) The act of God, in eternity past, choosing those for salvation based on His sovereign will alone, enabling His elect to receive Christ through supernaturally installed faith.

Much can be said for both of these views of predestination, which is beyond the scope of this writing. It is a very heavy undertaking, but one that I believe is important, if we want to make any sense at all as to the basis for which God makes His sovereign choices concerning salvation. Either God's choice of salvation for His elect is based on a person's choice and willingness, or it is based on God's own sovereign choice despite a person's inherent unwillingness. Both have merit for the sake of discussion, but both cannot be true Biblically.

I think that it is safe to say (and Biblical) that those whom God chooses for salvation, come willingly by faith, choosing Christ as their personal Savior. Both God and man are in full agreement and in mutual cooperation. Those whom God does not choose for salvation, cannot come willingly by faith, because man is morally incapable of making such a choice to begin with, due to the hardness of man's heart as a result of his sinful and corrupt nature and unwillingness to repent because of the deep fall of man in Adam. As Jesus explained to Nicodemus:

(John 3:6-8)

Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my

saying, 'You must be born again'. The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit."

Calvinism and Hyper-Calvinism ... Do Not Confuse the Two ... They are NOT the Same!

The *Reformed View of Predestination* (Calvinism) has been grossly misunderstood by some to mean that God chooses some to be saved who are kicking and screaming to resist Him all the way to Heaven, and that God condemns others who really want to be saved all the way to hell. (This is a *Hyper-Calvinistic* view better known as "*Fatalism*") If this were not such a serious issue, this interpretation of *predestination* would almost be laughable. It is NOT the Calvinistic view at all and should be rejected as Biblical heresy. *Reformed theology* (Calvinism) has always taught that all who come to Christ, come to Him willingly, and all who reject Christ, reject Him willingly. No one is forced against their *will* to do anything. The Scriptures are clear that all of us are inherently unwilling to receive Christ, unless God supernaturally effects a change in the *will* of man from *unwillingness* to *willingness* to receive Christ as savior. This is what the Grace of God is all about, because without God's grace, none of us would be willing to receive Christ.

The Doctrine of Double-Predestination

What Happens To Those Who Are Not Predestined For Salvation?

The doctrine of *Double-Predestination* is a very controversial subject. It is based on the premise that if God has an elect to whom He will give passage to heaven, by His design, then the rest of mankind is either actively or passively prevented from passage to heaven by His design. This is not a fun idea to entertain. But just because it is difficult, or even offensive to discuss, we should not avoid discussing it, just for the sake of making ourselves feel better. Doctrines designed to make us feel better can be deadly, and actually make us feel worse in the long run, especially if they are heretical in nature.

Some, that are of both the "*reformed*" and "*non-reformed*" persuasion, may argue that yes, God chooses those who are of the elect, but never chooses those who are of the non-elect. In other words, they maintain that God chooses who will go to heaven, but never chooses who will go to hell. But this makes absolutely no sense at all. If God chooses and establishes His heavenly elect, then He must also, by omission, have chosen those who He will not elect. By not choosing someone for salvation, He has effectually chosen them for His righteous judgment. If God has two clay vessels to deal with, how can He choose one vessel for noble purposes, without choosing the other for common use. This is the crux and pain of the doctrine of *Double-Predestination*. Remember though, God could choose that everyone suffer the eternal flames of hell, and be perfectly righteous in doing so without us accusing Him of foul play. The doctrine of *Double-Predestination* is a doctrine of God's amazing grace being applied to those who deserve eternal punishment, and issuing His justice to the rest of mankind, who deserve eternal punishment. But no one receives an injustice.

It should be pointed out that the *non-reformed* view of *predestination* has to deal with this particular issue also, because whether you are *reformed* or *non-reformed* in your view of *predestination*, God willingly and knowingly creates those who will ultimately perish forever in

the flames, regardless of *who* is doing the choosing.

Some argue that the idea of "predestined condemnation" is an idea that only Calvinists have to deal with. But dealing with why God would create a soul destined for eternal punishment is a universal question that weighs heavy on all of us, despite one's personal preference of *reformed* or *non-reformed* theological persuasion. This is because even those of the "*non-reformed*" persuasion must realize that even if man's fate is entirely predicated on man's choices and not with God's, God, in his foreknowledge, still allowed them to be born and exist, knowing the ultimate fate of an eternal existence in hell as a result of choices that would be made. So again, whether you are *reformed* or *non-reformed* in your view of predestination, God willingly and knowingly creates those who will ultimately perish forever in the flames.

The difference with the two systems is this; In the *non-reformed* view, man's hope for salvation rests entirely in man's abilities of faith in Christ, in order to receive the benefits of God's grace that leads to salvation; In the *reformed* view, man's hope for salvation rests entirely in God's grace to install the necessary faith in Christ that leads to salvation. One system is about man's abilities of faith, the other is about God's effectual grace which supplies even the necessary faith required. But both systems require help from God in some way. With the *non-reformed* view, the salvation process is as much dependant on man's will as it is in God's grace. With the *reformed* view, the salvation process is dependant exclusively in God's grace alone.

The *non-reformed* system will argue that salvations is achieved by the mutual cooperation of God and man, where man's faith is the catalyst for cooperation, while the *reformed* system will argue that salvation is achieved by God's grace alone, where God's grace supplies the necessary faith in man, in order for him to believe at all.

Can We Resist God's Grace or the Measure of Faith that God Gives To Us?

What Is God's Grace?

According to Wikipedia, the definition of "Divine Grace" is as follows:

"In Christianity, divine grace refers to the sovereign favor of God for humankind — especially in regard to salvation — irrespective of actions ("deeds"), earned worth, or proven goodness."

"Grace is enabling power sufficient for progression. Grace divine is an indispensable gift from God for development, improvement, and character expansion. Without God's grace, there are certain limitations, weaknesses, flaws, impurities, and faults (i.e. carnality) humankind cannot overcome. Therefore, it is necessary to increase in God's grace for added perfection, completeness, and flawlessness."

"Put another way, humankind is unable to evolve or be saved without God's grace; it is a prerequisite to salvation. Additionally, humans cannot exchange good deeds for it. It is a free gift from God. Thus, humankind is saved all by grace and not by some combination, mixture,

or blending of good works and divine grace. Were it achieved by works, humans could take pride in their efforts towards holiness."

The Biblical context of God's grace agrees. See the following Scriptures:

(Romans 11:5, 6)

So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace. And if by grace, then it is no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace.

(1 Corinthians 15:10)

But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.

(2 Corinthians 1:12)

Now this is our boast: Our conscience testifies that we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially in our relations with you, in the holiness and sincerity that are from God. We have done so not according to worldly wisdom but according to God's grace.

(2 Corinthians 9:8)

And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.

(2 Corinthians 12:9)

But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me.

(Galatians 2:21)

I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!"

(Ephesians 2:4, 5)

But because of His great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.

(Ephesians 4:7, 8)

But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. This is why it says: "When He ascended on high, He led captives in His train and gave gifts to men."

(Titus 3:4-7)

But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.

We looked at "Faith" earlier, and examined reasons for having faith. But a look at God's grace and what it means is necessary at this point because the biblical term "Grace" seems to mean different things to different people.

There are basically two versions or interpretations in theological discussions, as to what biblical

"Grace" means and accomplishes:

- **Non-Effectual Grace**

- *This interpretation maintains that God's grace is the act of God, through His mercy, love, and potential forgiveness, making it possible for man to be saved through the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It maintains that God's offer of salvation itself does not guarantee anything to men, but only makes it possible, dependant on man's willingness to believe and receive it*

Non-Effectual grace, therefore, falls short of actually saving men and is contingent on man's faith in Christ. — God, by His offer of grace, does not "effect" the man to be willing to receive it. Man must be willing on his own.

- **Effectual Grace**

- *This interpretation maintains that God's grace is the act of God, through His mercy, love, and forgiveness, making it a reality for man to be saved through the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It maintains that God's offer of salvation does guarantee everything necessary for a man, including God overcoming man's unbelief.*

Effectual Grace, therefore, when offered, always saves men by enabling man's faith in Christ. — God, by His offer of grace, does "effect" the man to be willing to receive it. Otherwise, man would never receive it.

Is God's Grace Irresistible?

The word "*Irresistible*", may to some, mean not having the freedom to resist something or being forced to accept something. In some cases, this would be an accurate definition of something *irresistible*. But *irresistible* can also mean freely choosing something because of an overwhelming passion or desire for it. I would like to clarify what the reformed position of *Irresistible Grace* is.

I can still remember the 1970's Mounds candy bar slogan: "*Simply Irresistible*". I do find a Mounds candy bar *simply irresistible*, but I know that I can choose to resist if; I knew that dinner time was in five minutes, or if I were on a diet that was more important to me than a candy bar, or if I were a severe diabetic that feared death as a consequence. However, if I know or believe that there are no negative consequences in consuming a Mounds candy bar, I will always choose to eat one, because I really desire Mounds candy bars. In this negative example, I am weighing the consequences of receiving something non-beneficial against the benefits of rejecting something non-beneficial.

In a positive example, I would be weighing the benefits of receiving something beneficial against the consequences of rejecting something beneficial. If someone totally understands the benefits of receiving Jesus Christ, and who also understands the consequences of rejecting Jesus Christ, they will always find what Jesus Christ offers irresistible. After all, who, in their right mind, knowing how corrupt and desperate they are, and knowing what God is really offering, would want to resist His divine grace? So, the effect of *Irresistible Grace* does not mean that someone can not resist, it means that someone will not resist it, while being both free and sincere in their choice. It is in this vain that the doctrine of Irresistible Grace has it's

meaning. God's grace is irresistible in the sense that it is too beautiful and precious to resist when truly understood.

If we could resist God's grace, then God's grace is not sufficient to overcome man's unbelief. If we could resist God's saving grace, then we would have to believe that we are more sovereign than God, and that our unbelief trumps God's grace. If the condition of experiencing God's grace is dependant on man's willingness to receive it, and not in God's sovereign purpose to administer it, THEN NO ONE WOULD RECEIVE IT !! This is because in man's fallen nature, no one wants it. It is by God's grace that we even desire Him at all. (See *Romans 3:11* above)

Some believe that God's grace has nothing whatsoever to do with overcoming our unbelief. They would argue that God's grace is not effectual in conditioning man to respond to God's salvation offer, and that men are responsible, all by themselves, to muster up enough faith required to accept God's gracious call to salvation. I do not find any scriptural support for this, and in fact, believe that the Scriptures communicates the opposite. (See *Scripture references above*)

It is pure arrogance to believe that man, in his limited free will, can in any way frustrate the sovereign will of God, in exercising His redemptive plans for His elect. Some would argue that God would never "violate" the free will of a man, in order to accomplish His purposes. I would like to say two things about this;

(1) When God conditions a man for salvation, a man comes willingly—there is no violation of will occurring here. And even if God does directly or indirectly effect a man's will, enabling him to be willing, what wrongful violation is occurring? Man is not "forced" to do anything, because he is receiving willingly. In other words, a man is not forced to believe unwillingly, but rather enabled to believe willingly!

(2) For those who are concerned about the idea of God violating man's free will here, consider this; Did God offer anyone a choice in any of the following: when they would be born?, where they would be born?, what sex they would be?, how rich or poor they would be?, what kind of a family up-bringing they would have?, what country they would live in?, how good looking or ugly they would be?, etc. Of course not! It seems that we allow God be sovereign in every area of our lives, except when it comes to our so-called free choices. Can you imagine someone in eternal hell saying the following: "I may be in hell, but at least I wasn't forced to choose eternal life against my will". I think not. Those suffering in eternal hell would have gladly had their wills transformed, even "violated", if it meant escaping the flames!

Philippians 2:13 is clear about God's activity in shaping and conforming our will and actions for His good purpose:

(Philippians 2:13)

for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to His good purpose

Faith as a Result of God's Grace is Irresistible in Nature

If we could resist the "*measure of faith*" that God gives to us, then He obviously does not give us enough to overcome our doubts! What kind of a measure of faith would that be? What kind of a god would toy with us like that? Why would God give us anything that's not quite good enough to get the job done? Simple, He wouldn't. Everything He gives is sufficient to complete

His holy purposes and sovereign decrees, flawlessly because He is flawless. He is true and sure in executing His redemptive plans for men, despite man's resistance and ignorance, and despite what all men justly deserve as a result of sin—death!

God did not subject His Son Jesus Christ to the horrors of the cross, only to leave it in the hands of mortal men to determine its effectiveness, but rather committed His Son to do a particular redeeming work to guarantee salvation for those whom Christ died for—the elect. God's plan of salvation will not be frustrated by man's inabilities and flaws.

If anyone thinks for a minute that their mortal decisions can frustrate God's sovereign master plan for them, then a quick review of the following Scriptures should dismiss that idea:

(Romans 9:15-21)

For He says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion. It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy. For the Scripture says to Pharaoh: "I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display My power in you and that My name might be proclaimed in all the earth." Therefore God has mercy on whom He wants to have mercy, and He hardens whom He wants to harden. One of you will say to Me: "Then why does God still blame us? For who resists His will?" But who are you, O man, to talk back to God? "Shall what is formed say to Him who formed it, 'Why did you make me like this?'" Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use?

Choosing to resist faith is like a man choosing to be a pig instead of a man. I know some men who act like pigs, but they're still men, despite their actions or external appearances. Man is what he is, and no matter how hard he tries, he cannot change the nature of who he is. Only God can do this. When God, for His own good pleasure and purposes, creates a spiritually live man from a spiritually dead man, a man is permanently changed. Even more than that, exchanged!—forever!! Once God enables faith in a man, resulting in Spiritual re-birth, not only does a man understand God in a way that he couldn't before, he will be so absorbed in the beauty and wonder of God and in His Son Jesus Christ, that the resulting measure of faith that he receives will be effectually rock-solid and sufficient for salvation. You could not force him to denounce his faith even with a gun at his head! (See *Hebrews 11:1* above)

Those who seemingly resist the grace of God, obviously have never understood the grace of God because it has never been supernaturally revealed to them. Man's sinful nature and heart of stone make it impossible to independently develop the necessary faith required for salvation, let alone comprehend what God's grace is all about. Natural man cannot comprehend spiritual things, nor does he have a desire to do so. (*1 Cor 2:14, John 3:6-8, Rom 3:11*)

God's grace and mercy overcomes man's lack of faith. God's grace overcomes all obstacles inherent in fallen man, as to regenerate him in a way that makes it impossible for His grace to ever fail. Once God's grace has been applied to a man, with His measure of faith installed, a man will not desire to resist, but rather desire to assist God in the work He started in him—freely and willingly! Thank God for that!

(John 6:37)

All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and whoever comes to Me I will never drive away.

(John 10:29)

My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of My Father's hand.

So Where Does Our Faith Come From?

What a relief to discover that Almighty God, fortunately, is more sovereign than us, and that even our faith is enjoyed by His gracious provision. What a great God we serve!!! Amen.

Why Should We Share Our Faith?

Why Share the Gospel at all if God's Choice in Election is Final?

Everyone Needs To Hear The Gospel

No matter what persuasion you happen to be, whether *reformed* or *non-reformed*, none of us know who the elect are. We should treat everyone as potential candidates for election and simply let God be sovereign in His election process. The "*Word*" needs to be heard by everyone, regardless of how we view man's will or God's sovereignty or which of these two holds the key to the final outcome. No matter how the fine points of the election process are viewed, the Gospel of salvation is always intimately involved as part of the salvation process. However, the *reformed* and *non-reformed* views of election hold different reasons for *why* the Gospel should be preached, and *why* we should be involved in evangelization.

The *non-reformed* Mind-Set Regarding Evangelization

The non-reformist rejects the idea of God's sovereign election as being the primary catalyst for salvation, and maintains that it is entirely up to man to make a moral decision regarding Christ, apart from any interference by God, because this would be a "*violation of man's free will*". So, they will insist that we need to evangelize, because men need to hear, understand, and make this moral decision for Christ, by free will, based on the truth of the Gospel, in order to be saved. They view the Gospel as being sufficient enough to change the mind of the unbeliever and that the unbeliever, therefore, must either accept or reject the Gospel, through "*free choice*". Therefore, the Gospel is only effective for those who make the *right choice*.

The *reformed* Mind-Set Regarding Evangelization

The reformist maintains that God's sovereign will, apart from man's unwillingness to come to Christ, is what secures salvation, but acknowledges that the Gospel is a process, by which God calls His sovereign elect. For those whom God has elected and made ready through rebirth, the Gospel will indeed always be received willingly, effectively accomplishing its purpose in the salvation process. Therefore, the Gospel is always effective for all of those whom God has sovereignty chose.

There Are Three Reasons That Should Motivate All Of Us To Preach / Teach and Share the Gospel:

(Mark 16:15)

He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation.

(Acts 10:42)

He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead.

(Romans 10:17-20)

Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ. But I ask: Did they not hear? Of course they did: "Their voice has gone out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world." Again I ask: Did Israel not understand? First, Moses says, "I will make you envious by those who are not a nation; I will make you angry by a nation that has no understanding." And Isaiah boldly says, "I was found by those who did not seek me; I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me."

2. **Because It Is God's Way Of Gathering His Elect:** God has given man the privilege of being involved, and has chosen to use His creatures, to be the method of communicating His plan of salvation through the "*foolishness of preaching*", in order to reach His sovereign elect. I thank God that He would choose to use you and me for this awesome opportunity. God certainly does not need us to accomplish His holy purposes, but He does use us, none the less, to involve us in the process. He has called us to be a "*Royal Priesthood*".

(Acts 13:48)

When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the Word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed

(Acts 18:27)

When Apollos wanted to go to Achaia, the brothers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples there to welcome him. On arriving, he was a great help to those who by grace had believed.

(Romans 10:15)

And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"

(1 Corinthians 9:16, 17)

Yet when I preach the Gospel, I cannot boast, for I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel! If I preach voluntarily, I have a reward; if not voluntarily, I am simply discharging the trust committed to me.

(2 Timothy 4:2)

Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction.

3. **Because It Is Pure Joy:** Anyone who has been transformed from death to life, and who has experienced God's grace and forgiveness in Christ, will not desire to silence their joy and passion in our Lord. The power and beauty of our Lord and Savior Jesus

Christ will have us shouting the Gospel of salvation from the roof-tops. How could a regenerated man not want to proclaim the Awesome God who saves lost souls, transforms us into new creatures, and forgives us of all sin; past, present and future. I thank God for being part of His Holy ordained processes of sharing the "Good News" because it is pure joy!

(1 John 1:3, 4)

We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. We write this to make our joy complete.

"Thank you Lord—for entrusting us with your precious Word!!"

What is Arminism and Calvinism? — A Quick Primer

Five Points of Arminism (James Arminius)

- **Partial Depravity of Man**
This idea is that man's moral free will was not so hindered by the fall of Adam and Eve, that he cannot choose salvation freely. Since the Bible speaks of man's responsibility of faith in Jesus Christ, the assumption is that faith, by free choice, is therefore possible by man alone. Man therefore is not so depraved that he cannot develop saving faith without supernatural aid, and must do so since it is the requirement of salvation. If God commands men to believe by faith, then man must be capable of it.
- **Conditional Election**
The idea here is that God looked into the future portal of time and elected those who He knew would choose Him, based on the condition of future faith in Jesus Christ. God's election is solely based on the decisions of men on how they would respond in faith, nothing else.
- **Unlimited Atonement**
The atonement of the cross is for everyone past, present and future, even though not everyone will enjoy its benefits. The interpretation here is that Christ's sacrifice on the cross was offered for everybody, but only effective for those who choose Him by faith.
- **Resistible Grace**
The concept here is that God has offered His saving grace to everyone, but most will resist His grace by free choice. Man can and does resist the Holy Spirit's call and by doing so condemns himself to eternal hell and punishment.
- **Falling Away of the Saints**
This is the natural conclusion of the *non-reformed* view of election. If man is saved by his own free moral choices, then he is also doomed by them as well. The Bible does speak of some who have "*fallen away*".

Five Points of Calvinism (John Calvin) - A Response to Arminism - (T.U.L.I.P.)

- **Total Depravity of Man**
The idea here is that man was so devastated by the fall of Adam and Eve, that he lost the capacity of free moral choice for anything spiritual. Not that he is as ultimately as bad as he could be, but sufficiently dead enough, that seeking and receiving Christ is not an option for a spiritually discerned man. He is so dead in his sinful nature that even to desire salvation requires an act of God.
- **Unconditional Election**
This concept is the idea that since man is not capable of even desiring Christ because of his corrupt nature, that God therefore must elect a man unconditionally, since the condition of faith by a man, required for salvation, is not possible by himself without God's supernatural assistance with man's faith.
- **Limited Atonement**
This point is also known as "Particular Redemption" and is used to refer to those whom Christ's death was meant to atone for. All those who are elect are also those who receive the benefits of atonement. Christ died to atone for the sins of His elect only, since those who are not of the elect will not benefit from the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Christ did not sacrifice for those who are not His own, nor did He need to. In other words, when all is said and done, of what value or effectiveness was the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, for those in eternal hell? None! Yet, all who Christ sacrificed for will be saved and none of these will be lost.
- **Irresistible Grace**
This concept is the idea that when God administers His grace, it is so effective and effectual that it even creates the necessary faith in a man so that he will always come willingly and freely to Christ, embracing the cross with deep conviction and relief. This grace is irresistible, not in the sense that man cannot resist it or is "forced" to receive it, but rather in the sense that man will never want to resist it when given.
- **Perseverance of the Saints**
This is the natural conclusion of the *reformed* view of election. If man is saved by God's sovereign choice, then he is also kept secure by God's choice as well. Since God initiates the processes, He will therefore finish it, completing His holy work of redemption. In other words, "*we can not loose our salvation by the things we do, because we do not gain our salvation by the things we do.*"

The Secular Humanistic Agenda and the Modern Church

Secular Humanism is the Pride of Self Sufficiency

Secular Humanism is nothing new. It has been around (in one form or another) ever since Adam and Eve were deceived into believing that they could think and act independently of God and form their own destiny in the cosmos. Not considering God's sovereign will and desire for them, they learned the hard way what happens when decisions are made independently of

God. As a result, mankind is still experiencing the consequences to this day. All throughout history, we see example after example where the human agenda has caused nothing but grief and suffering.

Being raised in a world where the default rationale is one of *Secular Humanism*, It is hard to divorce ourselves and our thought life from its influence. Even in the modern Church, with *non-reformed* systems of theological teaching, it makes it even harder to escape the humanistic systems of thought regarding man's self-sufficiency.

Secular Humanism is all about us, our abilities, our accomplishments, and our status in the universe. Its agenda places us in the highest authority. There is no room for a Sovereign God who determines every outcome and means by which it is accomplished, because this would be secular heresy to the almighty will of humanity. The *non-reformed* doctrine of election fits nicely into the humanistic system of self determination apart from any help from God.

Even though *Secular Humanism* and *Christianity* should be mutually exclusive and diametrically opposed to one another, it has found its way into the hearts and souls of many well-meaning believers. The world's mantra of self sufficiency and self importance has elevated man to god-like status and has diminished the grace of God to something unrecognizable. Unfortunately, I see this humanistic philosophy being practiced and preached all too often in the modern Christian Church as well. The grace of God is being reduced to nothing more than a loose term and catchy word used to describe something that God offers to a man if he measures up to a standard of self righteousness as evidenced by correct moral decisions.

It is my opinion and contention that the doctrine of *Arminism* is exactly that; a very self-focused, self willed (what can I do for myself) approach to salvation rather than a system that is totally dependant on the sovereign will and amazing grace of God. It is basically argued (in the *non-reformed* system of thought) that "God helps those who help themselves". I adamantly reject this interpretation of the Scriptures. The temptation for arrogance is high in the *non-reformed* system of theology, because it rests (or labors) in man's abilities rather than in God's free gifts. It depends (and boasts) on man's moral choices rather than on God's sovereign choice.

Thank God that He anticipated this and still overcomes even our selfish, self-focused approach to a better life. We would like to believe that we are authorities of life, but God trumps us because He IS the Author of life. He knows what it takes to create life in those who are dead. Dead men do not make life choices—only live men do! And when men are made alive by the grace of God, then and only then, can true faith in Christ be possible.

How Does Our Theology Effect The Way That We Live?

Does it Really Matter What We Believe?

What we believe to be true, about anything, will certainly effect the way we respond to circumstances and problems. The same can be said for what we believe about our faith.

Our Abilities

If we believe that the primary catalyst for faith is in our abilities, then we will live in such a way as to focus our attention on our abilities of faith. While I firmly believe the Biblical teachings that "faith leads to salvation", the real question is, what leads us to faith? Is saving faith an attribute inherently possible in all mankind? If we believe that faith is the product of our own volition, then our focus will naturally be on ourselves. If developing saving faith is solely our responsibility, then we should certainly be able to take credit for it if we can develop it.

And, as long as we believe that our faith is of our own volition, then we will focus on our efforts and count those who have no faith as heretics and losers, as we judge them with our legalistic gavel of self-righteousness. We will be quick to wipe the dust from our feet proclaiming that they do not measure up to God's requirement of faith. We will be proud of ourselves that we measured up to God's standard of faith.

If we believe that saving faith must be independently developed outside of God's influence, then the way that we evangelize the lost will be to convince them that they must make a moral choice for Christ by their own faith. We would have to persuade them to put their faith in Christ before anything spiritual can happen. We must teach them that they hold the key to eternity by their free moral choices through their faith. We must teach them that they must have faith before God will do anything for them.

God's Abilities

If, on the other hand, we believe that the primary catalyst for man's faith is the result of God's grace, then we will live in such a way as to focus our attention on God's abilities, through His grace that works His persuasion, motivation, and invitation. The burden of developing saving faith will not be dependant on our talents or attributes, but rather on God's.

When we understand God's sovereign election process, and understand that our faith is a gift from Him, we will be less likely to judge a man who has rejected the Gospel, knowing full well that God is in total control of the universe and will loose none that He has made His own. Men cannot be expected to understand spiritual things in their inherent carnal, unregenerate condition. The faith required by a man to turn from resistance to acceptance of the Gospel requires more than just will power, it requires heavenly power! If we believe that saving faith is part of God's grace package, then the way that we evangelize the lost will be to simply preach and teach the Gospel and let God be sovereign in His purpose and final outcome. We will understand and accept that when God sovereignly chooses a vessel of clay for noble purposes, that that vessel will respond in faith when hearing of the Gospel of salvation. We will believe that when God graciously reveals His Son to a man, through the work of His Spirit, he will respond to the Gospel, by faith, without any extra help from us. God does not need us to save a man, but chooses to use us anyway, through "*the foolishness of preaching the Gospel*". (1 Corinthians 1:21)

Theology Does Effect The Way We Live

Our theology effects everything about us. If our theology is secular, then we will place more emphasis on human will and accomplishment. If it is Biblical, then we will place more emphasis on God's sovereign will and accomplishments for His fallen creatures. One is about us, and the other is about Him. How often do we hear a sermon preached from a pulpit, about it being "*all about Jesus*", and then to be told a few moments later how "*it all depends on us*".

Depending on our theology, our life focus will either be in our abilities of faith, or in God's abilities of grace in developing our faith. The potential for faith either labors in man, or rests in God. If it labors in man, then man should take credit and be glorified. If it rests in God, then God should take credit and be glorified. Which of these theologies sounds biblical to you?

Closing Observations and Exaltations

Brothers and sisters, we must remember here that our ultimate struggle is not with each other, or with theological or humanistic systems of thought (as different as they may be), or even flesh and blood, but with principalities and powers that would delight in deceiving us into believing that it is "all about us". These earthly powers and demonic forces would divide us into a million pieces, if not for the grace of God who protects both His elect and sound doctrine. We, as Christian brothers and sisters, must all depend on the strength that God gives to us, to battle these demonic forces that causes the real divisions among us. May God humble us to the point of total dependence in Him and not in our theologies, lest Satan should gain a foothold and divide us even further.

(Ephesians 6:12)

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

As believers, if we really want to know the will of God as communicated in His word, then we must let Him speak truth to us, no matter how difficult it is to understand, believe or live. We must rely on His Spirit to give us the proper meaning, not ours. There are some things we will never understand about God, so we shouldn't try to. But for those truths that God has communicated to us through the Holy Scriptures, we need to let Him do the talking before we do the rationalizing, despite our personal philosophies to the contrary. If we rest in the Supreme, Sovereign, and final Word and will of God, and embrace the doctrines of grace set forth therein, it will humble the most proud of men, and give a peace, power and assurance that cannot be developed in ourselves or by ourselves.

"Lord, enable us to see and experience your beautiful and powerful truth, through your amazing grace—truth that sets us free to believe and truth that sets us free to love you and each other, because without your grace, we can do neither."